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*Can a sufficient Mid-day Meal  
be given to poor School Children  
at a Cost for Material of less  
than One Penny?*

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Read the following details of what has already been done, and then see whether like arrangements could not, with great advantage all round be made in your own neighbourhood.

*Extract from Speech delivered by the Right Honorable  
A. J. MUNDELLA, in the House of Commons, on  
Thursday, July 26th, 1883.*

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My attention has been much attracted to two phases of this question; one has reference to what has been said about the alleged overwork of the children; and the other has reference to the wretched homes in which the mass of the children live, and the question of under-feeding. I am bound to say the question of under-feeding, as far as I can gather, is by far the most serious question of the two. Mr. Marchant Williams, one of the Inspectors of the School Board of London, has, from his own interest in the question, been making very careful inquiry into the condition of all the thousands of children at present attending the School Board schools in London. There is an impression among many people that education in London has not reached the class for which it was intended; that we are not dealing with the poorest classes; and that the School Board of London is not bringing under the system the very poorest, most wretched, and most miserable among the outcast population. I cannot conceive a more mistaken notion, for anyone who takes up Mr. Marchant Williams's Report, and who will visit the schools in Whitechapel, Finsbury, Marylebone, Walworth, or Bethnal Green, will be somewhat astonished at the wretched character of the surroundings of the children, and the wretchedly-fed children who are to be found in those schools. My attention was first called to the question by an accident, which I will shortly relate to the Committee. I was referred to a school in the country which is doing marvellously good work, and which has had surprisingly good results among a scattered population, and I wanted to know how those results were accounted for. I made an inquiry of the Inspector with respect to that school, and I will state to the House the result. It was a rural school in

Devonshire. [An hon. MEMBER: Whereabouts?] It is on the Coast, at the village of Rousdon; and the results of that village school have been very startling. In 1880 there were on the books of the school 89 children; the average attendance was 76; 79 were eligible for examination; and there were passed 98 per cent. in reading, 96 per cent. in writing and spelling, 98 per cent. in arithmetic, 56 per cent. in geography, 79 per cent. in grammar, 8 in literature, and 5 in domestic economy. That was rather a heavy programme; but, at the last inspection, which came off some two or three months ago, I find the following was the result:—There were 84 children on the books; the average attendance was 81·6; 81 out of the 84 were eligible for examination, and there passed 100 per cent. in reading, 100 per cent. in writing and spelling, 98 per cent. in arithmetic, 100 per cent. in geography, 87 per cent. in grammar; while 14 passed a good examination in literature, and 11 passed well in domestic economy. Order, discipline, singing, and needlework were reported good, and the school was classed “excellent.” It is impossible that there could be a better school than that.

MR. W. E. FORSTER: Was it under a master and mistress?

MR. MUNDELLA: Yes; there are both a master and mistress.

MR. W. E. FORSTER: Is it a board school, or what?

MR. MUNDELLA: It is a National School, which was set up a few years ago by an hon. Member of this House, who, finding the success of the schools of the neighbourhood lacking, the labourers wretchedly fed, the population poor and scattered over extensive districts, devised the means for getting better results than could ordinarily be obtained. He found that the children were poor and ill-fed, and that they could not walk two, three or four miles a day, bringing with them wretched morsels of food for dinner, with satisfactory results. Well, my hon. Friend who set up the school perceived that something must be done in the direction of feeding the children, as well as educating them, and he solved the difficulty in this way. He said—“I will supply the children with one sufficient meal a-day on the five days a-week they attend the school, and that meal, for material, shall not cost more than a penny a head.” My hon. Friend is a thorough business man, and he has kept an account of every penny spent and received, and the result is not uninteresting. I hold in my hand a record of the quantity of food supplied. The account of



the expenditure was carefully kept to the utmost farthing; and, at the last examination, it was found that the total number of dinners given to the children was 110,221 from October, 1876, to December, 1882, at a total cost of 107,406 pence, and they were good full meals for every child. If anyone doubts how it can be done, I have here the items of flour, suet, meat, potatoes, bread, rice, sugar, and every other article consumed in the dinners supplied in that school, the total number of which was 110,221, at a cost of 107,406 pence for seven years. The average of solid food per child was about eight ounces. It could be fairly said that 10 dinners, including cooking expenses and wear and tear, did not cost more than 1s. The girls assisted in the cooking, which was part of the *curriculum* of the school. I thought I ought to inquire from Her Majesty's Inspector what his opinion was as to the experiment made in this rural school, and Mr. Howard writes—

“I believe that Sir Henry Peek's experiment has turned out a very great success. What strikes one at once in coming into the school is the healthy, vigorous look of the children, and that their vigour is not merely bodily, but comes out in the course of examination. There is a marked contrast between their appearance and their work on the day of inspection, and those of the children in many of the neighbouring schools. The mid-day meal is good, and without stint. It acts as an attraction and induces regularity of attendance. In fact, the number on the register is 84, and the average attendance, above 81, speaks for itself; but, besides that, the dinners supply physical material, by which better brain work can be done. The examination hardly does justice to the condition of the school; it gives the number of classes; but does not give the quality. In the accompanying sheets I have put down some statistics.”

I will not give the statistics; but Mr. Howard shows that four out of five of the children passed easily. He goes on to say—

“Their work is most thorough; but, without regular attendance and intelligence to act upon them, much of it would be thrown away. As to the regular attendance, I find there are some children who have been in attendance 400 times a-year. It is not amazing, therefore, that this satisfactory result should have been produced.”

The Inspector adds that —

“It is a real pleasure to examine the Rousdon School. Before the school was started, the education of the children of the neighbourhood was as low as in any part of the district.”

He goes on to describe what was the real condition of the children in the neighbourhood. I do not bring this forward for the sake of complimenting the hon. Baronet opposite the Member for Mid Surrey (Sir Henry Peek); but I want to point a moral, and to show the connection between education and properly feeding the children. This

Rousdon School proves that children properly fed, and attending school regularly, not only enjoy a good *physique* and good health, but that they prosper in their education also. There is no over-pressure on those children, and it proves that there is no over-pressure where there is regular attendance and good feeding. The great difficulty we have to contend against is the lack of these two essentials. Let me refer the House to the case of the Jews' Free School, Bell Lane, Spitalfields. It is a school where the teachers have to grapple with enormous and unheard-of difficulties. There are about 3,000 children, who come in with a very imperfect knowledge of the English language, speaking a *patois* of two or three European languages, and most of them having some knowledge of Hebrew. The average attendance is 95 per cent, and the work done is amongst the highest in England. They pass a heavier *curriculum*, and in a larger number of classes, than any other school. The school is in every way excellent. Then, how is it done? I myself asked how it could be done among such a wretched population. The children, when not at school, are employed in selling newspapers, or cigar lights, or lucifer matches. They are poor Jews' children put to earn something directly the school hours are over, and it is surprising what the enterprize of these people is. But considerable influence is exercised by the benevolence of the friends of the school, who not only pay great attention to the wants of the children generally, but also present gifts of clothing, and in other ways help the children to attend the school. I am afraid that, in this respect, the Jews are very much better than the Christians. In the West End, the Jews do their duty thoroughly by the children of the East End Jews. I wish I could see the West End Christians doing the same by the East End Christians. I have here a statement with regard to three other schools. The first is the Saffron Hill School, Farringdon Road. It is a school supported by 313 families, 182 of which, or 58 per cent., live each in one room only. There are others who live two in a room; and so they go on, living one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and even ten in a room. Fifty-eight per cent. of the children of the Saffron Hill School in the Farringdon Road come out of those wretched homes of one room. The Golden Lane School is supported by 487 families, 400 of which, or 82 per cent., reside in one room only; 21 per cent. have six persons and upwards in a room. The Tower Street Schools, Seven

Dials, are supported by 339 families, 289 of which, or 85 per cent. reside in one room each; eight of these families have nine persons in a single room; and so they range, from one to eight, nine, and ten persons in a single room. I am taking advantage of Mr. Marchant Williams's figures in regard to this question, and he reports upon a considerable number of schools. In the Drury Lane School the percentage of attendance is very excellent. The average attendance is 86 in the boys' department, 86 in the girls', and 71 in the infants' department; 52 per cent. of the children come from families living in one room only; 3 per cent. from families residing in two rooms; and 12 per cent. live in more than two rooms. The Vere Street School, close to Clare Market, was examined by Mr. Matthew Arnold, and he states that the way in which the boys recited a poem showed that they were extremely intelligent children, and that they had thoroughly mastered what they had learned. Nevertheless, 75 per cent. of those children belonged to families who reside in one room only. Many of the children are the offspring of the criminal and vicious classes. The children are to be pitied, and are sometimes found faint from want of food. Indeed, in many cases, persons have gone out to buy bread for the children, in order to enable them to stand the school labour. But if anybody supposes that these children are better out of school than in, it is the greatest possible mistake in the world. It is the one bright spot in the child's existence; it is his only place of happiness and comfort, and he is under good sanitary regulations while he is at school. He is warm, and well fed, and is subject to cheerful exercises, including singing and physical training, which are most enjoyable to him. Indeed, the children cry when their mothers want to keep them at home, and they cry also when the holidays come. There cannot be a better proof of what is being done by bringing the child into the school. I have only given the Committee facts with regard to three or four schools; but I could give a great many more, and I could show that all over London a fearful state of things exists, and that it behoves people with human hearts and ordinary minds to do something in order to help the children to attend school. I must say that my friend the hon. Baronet who sits opposite, the Member for Mid-Surrey (Sir Henry Peek) has set an example which ought to be taken up all over London. There is no country in which so little has been done

to help the children to go to school as in our own country—I mean to help them with food and clothing. Great sacrifices have been made by benevolent societies in America to rescue thousands of children from the streets of New York and elsewhere. Indeed, the results of those efforts have been something which we, in England, could hardly realize; but we now see that 10 dinners can be provided for 1s.; and if the West End would only do a little more in charity for the children of the East End thousands of these children might be saved from broken health, and induced regularly to attend school.

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*From "THE LANCET," August 4th, 1883.*

SIR HENRY PEEK, Bart., is one of those large-hearted men who find their highest pleasure in benefiting whole classes of the population, and who work hard in private to secure the success of any enterprise they undertake. With his well known acumen he has struck right down at the root of the so-called "overworked" question, and recognised—we might almost say discovered—the real efficient cause of the evil, while other philanthropists not less interested or in earnest, but not so practical, have been lopping with sensational vigour at the topmost branches. SIR HENRY PEEK, looking with a keen business eye into the condition of the scholars of a national school of which he is patron, has perceived that they are, as a rule, underfed. Unfortunately this is *the* cause of the educational difficulty throughout the country. Children are generally "better clothed," as the phrase goes, than they were twenty or thirty years ago, but they are not properly or adequately fed. Social reform has been very much a whitening of sepulchres as regards the poorer classes. Police regulations have compelled parents to spend more money on the clothing of their children, but it has done nothing to improve the quality or to increase the quantity of their food. They look more respectable, according to our conventional notion of what constitutes "respectability," but they are just as hungry as, and therefore not happier than, they were before society, in one of its hyper-philanthropic moods, took their condition seriously in hand.

The Education system is *not* overworking children, but it is demonstrating that they are underfed. It would, indeed, be a boon to the country if all school patrons were as astute as SIR HENRY PEEK, and withal as sagacious in finding a remedy for the evils they discover. With admirable tact SIR HENRY has devised a system of cheap dinners for children. The parents pay five pence for five dinners in each week, so that they are not pauperised or released from their responsibility; and for this small sum the children have an excellent midday meal. It is needless to say that the "attendance" at school is found to be well-maintained, and the children are better, healthier, and happier than the children of other schools. This is a movement so praiseworthy that we cannot allude to it except in terms

of warmest approval. We do not hesitate to affirm that SIR HENRY PEEK has shown school managers generally how to cut the Gordian knot of the education question. Do not reduce the number or difficulty of the lessons, but increase the quantity and improve the quality of the food.

That good feeding is necessary for brain-nutrition does not need to be demonstrated, or even argued at length. The brain is part of the body, and—referring to our recent remarks on “Overwork in Connexion with Education,”—it must be evident that the position in which education places the brains of underfed children is that of a highly exercised organ urgently requiring food and finding none, or very little. These children are *growing*, and all or nearly all the food they can get is appropriated by the grosser and bulkier parts of the body to the starvation of the brain. If their brains were not stimulated by intellectual work they would be simply left undeveloped. As it is, they struggle for food with the other organs of the body, and every part of the organism is reduced to a condition favourable to disease. Other things being equal, a growing child with a hungry brain is worse off both in mind and body than a dullard. If the organ of mind were not at work it would not be so urgent in its demand for food, and even a poorly fed child might grow in body generally; but being mentally active and underfed, it can neither be healthy in brain nor in muscle. This is a matter of great moment, and ought to be carefully considered by all who have the care of the young. It is cruel to educate a growing child unless you are also prepared to feed him. Brain-nutrition makes a larger demand on the supplies than general nutrition, and it requires that its special needs shall be satisfied immediately. This is why fish is so useful to brain workers, because it is completely digested in less time and with less trouble to the stomach than most other articles of food. Children are generally provided with excellent powers of digestion and assimilation, but these faculties are useless without food. Children who are not adequately supplied with nourishment soon begin to look exceptionally sickly if they are made to work with their heads, whereas if only working with their bodies they may be fairly well on comparatively little.

ROUSDON SCHOOL, DEVON.

Parent.	Children in all depend- ent.	At School regu- larly.	Position.	Wages and Emoluments equal to per week.	Pays Rent.	Pays for Schooling and the Mid-day Meal per week.	Arrears.
1	1	1	Farm labourer	14/-	0	5d.	Not a penny since the School was opened in 1876.
2	5	2	"	13/-	1/6	9d.	
3	1	1	"	10/- and wood	0	5d.	
4	8	5	Schoolmaster	.. ..	..	..	
5	1	1	Farm labourer	10/-	0	5d.	
6	4	3	"	10/- and wood	1/6	1/-	
7	5	4	"	16/-	1/-	1/3	
8	4	3	Mechanic	.. ..	..	1/-	
9	4	2	"	.. ..	1/6	9d.	
10	4	3	Coastguard	.. ..	..	1/-	
11	5	3	Farm labourer	13/-	1/6	1/-	
12	2	1	"	10/- and wood	0	5d.	
13	4	4	Shepherd	16/-	0	1/3	
14	2	2	Widow	.. ..	1/6	9d.	
15	4	4	Carpenter	16/-	2/-	1/3	
16	3	3	Farm labourer	13/- and wood	0	1/-	
17	3	2	"	16/-	1/6	9d.	
18	2	2	Mechanic	.. ..	1/6	9d.	
19	2	1	Farm labourer	13/-	1/6	5d.	
20	2	2	"	13/- and wood	0	9d.	
21	5	4	Mechanic	.. ..	..	1/3	
22	4	2	Farm labourer	16/-	1/6	9d.	
23	2	1	"	14/-	0	9d.	
24	4	3	"	13/- and wood	0	1/-	
25	4	2	"	10/- and wood	0	9d.	
26	1	1	"	16/-	1/-	5d.	
27	2	2	"	16/-	2/-	9d.	
28	3	3	"	16/-	1/-	1/-	
29	2	1	Widow	.. ..	0	5d.	
30	2	1	Farm labourer	14/-	0	5d.	
31	2	2	Farmer	.. ..	..	10d.	
32	2	2	Farm labourer	14/-	0	9d.	
33	2	2	"	15/-	1/6	9d.	
34	5	4	Mechanic	.. ..	..	1/3	
106		79				£1 6 5	

As above there are at present (July, 1883) 79 Children on the Books, and we can depend upon an Average Attendance of 73 both morning and afternoon, though the majority live over a mile from the School House. Absence in the afternoon is of very rare occurrence; and, as the children, one and all, prefer school to home, the periodical holidays find no favour with them. The charge is 5d. per week for one, 9d. for two, 1s. for three, and 3d. each beyond three of the same family. No discount to farmers for their children. The Government Grant for the year ending March, 1883, was £86 2s.

*Materials composing the Mid-day Meals provided at ROUSDON SCHOOL,  
DEVON, from October, 1876, to December, 1882.*

							£	s.	d.
FLOUR	..	16,978 lbs.	at 1½d. per lb.	..	..	..	106	2	3
SUET	..	1,268	,, , 5d.	..	..	..	26	8	4
MEAT	..	3,273	,, , 6d., 7d., 7½d. and 9d. per lb.	..	..	..	83	3	4½
POTATOES	..	7,556	,, , 1d. per lb.	..	..	..	31	9	8
ONIONS	..	675	,, , 1½d., and 227 lbs. at 1d. per lb.	..	..	..	5	3	3½
BREAD	..	4,694	,, , 1½d. per lb.	..	..	..	29	6	9
TREACLE	..	1,407	,, , 2½d.	..	..	..	14	13	1½
RICE	..	2,652½	,, , 2d.	..	..	..	22	2	1
SUGAR	..	1,134	,, , 2½d.	..	and 694 lbs. at	3d. per lb.	20	9	9
MILK	..	696 gals.	at 8d. per gallon	..	..	..	23	4	0
PEAS, BEANS & LENTILS		627½ lbs.	,, 1½d. per lb., and 172 lbs. at			1d. per lb.	4	12	9½
CURRANTS	..	1,053	,, , 4d.	..	..	..	17	11	0
CABBAGES	..	1,450	,, at 1d.	..	..	..	6	0	10
TURNIPS	..	548 lbs.	at 1d. per lb.	..	..	..	2	5	8
APPLES	..	1,264	,, , 1¼d.	..	and 790 lbs. at	1d. per lb.	9	17	6
CARROTS	..	766	,, , 1d.	..	& PARSNIPS, 196 lbs. at	1d. per lb.	4	0	2
PEARL BARLEY	..	9	,, , 2½d.	..	(as a trial only)	..	0	1	10½
JAM	..	478½	,, , 3½d.	..	and 416½ lbs. at	4d. per lb.	13	18	4¾
LARD	..	104	,, , 6½d.	..	..	..	2	16	4
RHUBARB	..	1,072	,, , 1d.	..	..	..	4	9	4
SAGO	..	162	,, , 3d.	..	..	..	2	0	6
RAISINS	..	658	,, , 5d.	..	..	..	13	14	2
PEPPER AND SALT		130½	,, , ..	..	..	..	1	16	9
SPICE	..	4½	,, at 2s. 8d. per lb.	..	..	..	0	12	0
PRUNES	..	23	,, , 3½d.	..	..	..	0	6	8½
GOOSEBERRIES	..	70	,, , 1d.	..	..	..	0	5	10
HONEY	..	18	,, , 1s.	..	..	..	0	18	0
							£447	10	5½

Total Dinners, 110,221. Cost 107,406 Pence.

Average of Solid Food per Child, almost 8oz, which is more than the little ones can consume.



*Letter to the Editor of "THE NEWCASTLE DAILY CHRONICLE," from the Rev. W. MOORE EDE.*

A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT.

THE PENNY DINNERS FOR POOR SCHOOL CHILDREN.

SIR,

As I believe some account of an experiment I have recently tried in connection with the St. Mary's National School here will interest your readers, and may lead to its being tried in other elementary schools, I send you the following account of an attempt I have made to provide penny dinners for poor children.

Some few weeks ago, when I received a pamphlet headed with the question, "Can a sufficient mid-day meal be given to poor school children at a cost for material of less than one penny?" I felt disposed to reply, Most certainly not! I found, however, that Sir Henry Peek, M.P., claimed to have accomplished the feat at a country school of from 70 to 80 children, situated on his estate at Rousdon, in Devonshire, where mid-day meals have been provided since October, 1876, at a cost of 107,406 pence for 110,221 dinners, with an average allowance of solid food of 8 oz. per child.

According to the information given in the pamphlet the result of this provision of food was better health of the scholars, more vigorous vitality, which made itself manifest in improved educational results.

The Government Inspector (Mr. Howard) reported:—

"What strikes me at once in coming into the school is the healthy, vigorous look of the children, and that their vigour is not merely bodily but comes out in the course of examination. There is a marked contrast between their appearance and their work on the day of inspection and those of the children in many of the neighbouring schools."

Mr. Mundella, speaking of the results attained by the Rousdon School stated in the House of Commons that—

"It is impossible there could be a better school,"

And attributed the result to the securing to the children at least one good, wholesome meal a day.

Notwithstanding these testimonies, I was still somewhat incredulous, and therefore went to inspect the school myself. A finer, healthier set of children than those of Rousdon School I never saw. The mid-day meal, which I had expected to be a miserable allowance, not more than sufficient to satisfy half the appetite of a healthy child, I found

to be liberal in quantity, so that all, or almost all, got as much as they could eat, and an examination of the dinner account showed that the average cost was really less than one penny per head.

What can be done in Devonshire can be done on Tyneside, so I determined to try the experiment in our National School. As we have about 1,000 children in our school, I felt that number would be unmanageable. Inquiry made it clear that about 80 per cent. of the children were well cared for at home, but that the remainder were very scantily fed, their customary dinner being a piece of bread and a cup of tea, and many often did not get that. I, therefore, reserved the privilege of dining at school to those who were children of widows, or whose fathers were out of work.

The following is the result of the first week's experiment.—

MONDAY—SOUP AND BREAD.

	s.	d.
1 Ox head (7 lbs of solid meat and bone) ..	2	6
7 lbs. Potatoes ..	0	3½
2 lbs. Onions ..	0	2
2 lbs. Rice ..	0	1½
5 lbs. Bread ..	0	8

Dinner for 51 children 3 9

TUESDAY—RHUBARB PUDDING.

Flour, 28 lbs. ..	3	2
Suet, 3 lbs. at 6d. ..	1	6
Sugar, 7½ lbs. at 2d. ..	1	3½
Rhubarb, valued at 1s... ..	1	0

Dinner for 91 children 6 11½

WEDNESDAY—RICE WITH  
JAM OR TREACLE.

Rice, 30 lbs. ..	3	3
Jam, 7 lbs. ..	1	10½
Treacle, 10 lbs. ..	1	10½

Dinner for 112 children 7 0

THURSDAY—SOUP.

	s.	d.
1½ Ox heads (11½ lbs. meat and bone) ..	3	9
Ham bones ..	1	0
Pea flour, 7 lbs... ..	1	0
Rice, 6 lbs. ..	0	8
Onions, 4½ lbs. ..	0	4½
Potatoes, 7 lbs. ..	0	3½
Bread, 14 lbs. ..	2	0

Dinner for 117 children 9 1

And a surplus of 44 quarts  
of strong soup, which  
was sold to parents at  
½d. per quart .. 1 10

117 Dinners, net cost 7 3

FRIDAY—ROLY-POLY PUDDING.

Flour, 36 lbs. ..	3	10
Bacon, 14 lbs. ..	3	0
Suet, 2½ lbs. ..	1	3

Dinner for 108 children 8 1

During the week 479 dinners were provided, at a cost of 396½ pence, thus leaving a balance of 6s. 10½d. as profit.

The profit is quite sufficient to pay for the cost of fuel and for the labour of cooking, for some of the girls in the school assist in the preparation of the dinner and in the washing up afterwards, and thus get a good practical lesson in domestic economy.

This financial result has not been obtained by placing the children on short allowance. They have had each day as much as they could eat; for, unlike *Oliver Twist*, they have been allowed to ask for more as often as they pleased. One boy was heard to boast that he had sent in his plate eight times, and five helps were common.

Of the educational result there has not as yet been time to judge, but it must lead to improved results and an increase in the Government grant; for it is evident, as the *Lancet* says, that the position in which education places the brains of underfed children is that of a highly exercised organ urgently requiring food and finding none—or very little.

The parents of the poorest class cannot, and do not, provide adequate food for their children, and as a consequence they grow up weak and sickly, a source of weakness rather than strength to the community, and in their turn perpetuate a succession of weekly and feeble children, and so the evil intensifies with each generation.

Parents can and will make an effort to procure the pence necessary to provide their children with such dinners as I have described, and they tell me they consider these penny dinners a great boon—"one of the best things that ever was."

Why should not a system of penny dinners be established in connection with all our National and Board Schools, at any rate those in poor districts?

The scheme would be absolutely self-supporting. All that the charitable public would need to do would be to subscribe for the first cost of fitting up a simple cooking apparatus, a store room, and a supply of plates, basins, spoons, &c.—*i.e.*, from £9 to £13 for each school.

The dinner money can be collected on Monday morning in the same manner as the school pence by the master of each form, who, knowing something of the circumstances of each pupil, would only

place on the dinner list the names of those whom he knew to be children of parents who were badly off.

If this plan were adopted extensively, we should be able to deal, as far as the children are concerned, with the distress which we are all dreading will come upon us with the approach of winter, for we should have an organised system of dealing with all the poor children of school age, and the charitable public could pay for the dinners of those whose parents were utterly unable to procure the fivepence per week. The less charity is resorted to the better, and whatever is done in that direction should not be done by the masters or managers of the school, for that would excite jealousy and ill-feeling on the part of those for whom they do not pay the fee. Just as the School Board remit the school fees in cases of proved inability to pay, so the charitable public, either through the School Board or by means of some special organisation, might pay to the school the dinner money of those whose inability to pay was satisfactorily proved.

In conclusion, allow me to say that I shall be glad to receive criticism publicly or privately, and any suggestions for the improvement of this experiment will receive my careful consideration. I have given the result of my first week's experiment, and I anticipate that much better results, both as regards dietary and finance, can be obtained than those I have achieved in my first week's experiment.

Yours, &c.,

W. MOORE EDE.

THE RECTORY,

GATESHEAD-ON-TYNE.

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*From "NEWCASTLE DAILY CHRONICLE," June 3rd, 1884.*

## PENNY DINNERS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY CHRONICLE.

SIR,

Mr. Moore Ede deserves the warmest thanks of all practical philanthropists for the scheme which he unfolds in your issue of to-day. I am certain he is on the right tack, and that our present-day zeal for the mental training of the little ones may very advantageously be supplemented by a greater regard for their bodily welfare. It is much to be feared that we have been setting the schoolmaster to work at hammering book-learning into poor little brains that are sadly attenuated by lack of material nourishment, and that many a wee head is called upon to make efforts which its poor body is to ill fed to support. There can be little doubt about the sad results of such a system, and no difference of opinion as to our duty in regard to their amelioration. Penny dinners for the little ones, then, by all means. We are agreed as to the principle; let us lay our heads together as to the details.

Mr. Moore Ede will, I am sure, pardon me if I say that I am not quite clear as to the financial working of his bills of fare. I am assured that an ox head, in good condition, is not commonly bought for half-a-crown; the rice at three farthings a pound is considered to be of more than doubtful quality; the sixpenny suet appears questionable; and the bacon at a fraction over twopence halfpenny a pound seems hardly good enough to be true. This leads me to inquire whether his calculations have been based upon the ordinary market prices of the goods, or whether he has let benevolence enter into the account, in the shape of exceptionally cheap supplies from sympathising tradesmen. If the latter, it can hardly form a basis for general calculations; if the former, then I can only congratulate him upon the cheapness of provisions in his parish.

I doubt not that Mr. Ede will receive a number of suggestions from private correspondents, from which he could compile a kind of handbook on this subject. May I suggest to him that such a compilation would be a very important step towards carrying out the excellent work which he has in view, not only in his own immediate neighbourhood, but in other places far afield? I for one shall be very glad to contribute to the expense of publishing such a compilation, and to help locally in the good work by any means in my power.—

Yours, &c.,

H. BYRON REED.

DARLINGTON, 31st May, 1884.

From "NEWCASTLE DAILY CHRONICLE," June 9th, 1884.

## PENNY DINNERS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY CHRONICLE.

SIR,

As the question of providing cheap dinners for poor children is one of general interest, I desire to say, in reply to the letters published in your issue of to-day—

1. That the calculations of cost given in my letter which you published were based upon the ordinary *market* prices, not retail prices of the goods. By an oversight, I put down the cost of 2 lbs. of rice at 1½d.; it should have been 3d. It may be well to explain that the 14 lbs. of bacon consisted of "shank ends," which are often sold very cheap. The bones were put into the soup, and 1s. was debited for the cost. The meat was served up in a roly-poly pudding, and entered as costing 3s.

2. I have no present intention of compiling a hand-book of receipts for cheap dinners; but when I return from Stockholm, whither I am going to inspect a system of supplying cheap food for the working classes, I shall be very glad to render any assistance in my power to anyone who desires to try the experiment of providing penny dinners for school children.

3. I am aware of the existence of the Destitute Children's Dinner and Clothing Fund in Newcastle, and know the benefit it has been in times of severe distress. But the plan which I am trying differs from that in two important respects—first, it is not a charity at all, though it may be a means which the charitable can use, for there is nothing to prevent charitable persons paying for the dinners of the most destitute; and second, the plan is one which will, I hope, become a permanent institution, part of the regular school system. There are always a number of children, who though not actually starving, are decidedly underfed, or what comes to the same thing, unprovided with wholesome, well-cooked, and nutritious food. A very common case is that of a widow who goes out for the day. She leaves no one at home to prepare a dinner for her children. At best they get a piece of bread, which may or may not have butter on it. Very often the house is locked up, and they get nothing at all. These children are not cases for charity. The mother can very well, on most days of the week, give them a penny to get a good meal at school, and I find that parents situated in the way I have described do find these penny dinners the very thing to meet their need.

4. Some additional information gathered by further experience will interest some of your readers.

I attempted last week to get the whole of the money for the week (*i.e.*, fivepence) paid on the Monday. I thought that many would be able to pay fivepence on Monday who might not have a penny on

Thursday or Friday, and also the payment in advance would facilitate the arrangement of the quantity of food required for each day. Experience proved that the parents, especially those who live in the most reckless hand-to-mouth way, and whose children are worst provided for, would not part with 5d. at one time. A penny a day is nothing, but 5d. at once is a different thing, and not to be thought of!

Inquiry among the teachers showed that they had already observed greater activity of brain on the part of the children who dined at school than they had displayed before. Certainly, it seemed to me, that those who dined regularly at school had begun to show signs of improvement in their physical condition.

We extended the bill of fare which I gave last week by the addition of two dishes, both of which were very popular, viz., fig pudding, with sweet sauce, and peas pudding. The first-named proved a trifle extravagant, as dinner for 80 cost 90 pence. But those of us who can remember our own youthful gastronomic feats, will not be surprised that with such a bill of fare as fig pudding—and a very good one, too—the children proved they could consume more than a penny-worth.

The following extract from our parish magazine will give all that I have to say further on this subject at the present time:—

“The result which has been achieved is due to the economy which comes from supplying a large number, and purchasing the best articles at wholesale prices. There is no intention of making a profit beyond what is just sufficient to pay the cost of cooking and fuel, any further profit will be devoted to the improvement of the dinners.

“The object which the Rector has in establishing these dinners is to assist parents in these bad times, by enabling them to get a cheaper meal for their children than they could provide at home, and to do this in such a way that the parents may not feel they are receiving a charity.

“As those who are in regular work ought to be able to provide for their families, the Rector has drawn up the following—

#### RULES FOR PENNY DINNERS.

“I.—Only children of widows, or those whose parents are out of work or on short time, will be allowed to dine at the school.

“II.—Any child wishing to dine at school must give his dinner money to the teacher of his class at the beginning of school.

“III.—No credit will be allowed, nor will money be taken at the dinner hour.

“IV.—It is very desirable that, when possible, the money for the whole week should be paid on Monday in advance.”

Yours, &c.,

THE RECTORY,

W. MOORE EDE.

GATESHEAD, *June 3.*

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*From "NEWCASTLE DAILY CHRONICLE," June 16th, 1884.*

## A MODEL SCHOOL.

### THE PENNY DINNERS AT ROUSDON.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

In an out-of-the-way corner of South-East Devon—within half a mile of the sea—may be found a little building which seems destined to exercise a powerful influence for good. It stands on the estate of Sir Henry W. Peek, at Rousdon, and is a gift from the worthy baronet to the poor people around him. Though he represents Mid-Surrey in Parliament—and all his business connections lie elsewhere—Sir Henry is a Devonshire man by birth, and has a genuine admiration for his native county. Having purchased the property some 14 years ago, he began a series of operations which quickly changed its appearance. There was no attempt at restoration. The hall and the church—which had long been crumbling to decay—were at once razed to the ground, and on their sites arose a group of many-gabled edifices that are quite as useful, and far more picturesque, than those they supplanted. Grey flint walls, Purbeck stone dressings, and bright red tiles from Bridgwater, are the leading characteristics of the new homestead, and, as the dainty structures are seen above the tall cliffs which overhang the green waters of the channel, they irresistibly call to mind the "artist haunts" of vastly different lands. Everything is now as perfect as money and attention could ensure. The boundary walls and lodges are in harmony with the main buildings; the paths and pleasure grounds are trim and well arranged; and the surrounding country—with its wealth of fern and wild flower—forms a not inappropriate setting for the charming residence which Sir Henry has copied from Tudor times.

The school is in strict keeping with the other erections. It is placed just outside the chief entrance to the estate, and stands quite alone. Externally, it is a thing of undoubted beauty—with its canopied bell-turret, its dormer windows, its steeply slanting roofs, and its neat surrounding of well-kept garden ground. Already its laurel edges are interwoven with honeysuckle, and its walls profusely decked with roses and other climbing plants. It is more like a villa residence than a country school. Except for the gravelled play-yard, and the well-sheltered swings and vaulting bars, there is nothing to indicate the purpose for which the place is used. There is no cluster of cottages alongside—as is usually the case—and little else can be seen but the adjacent lodge gate, and the miles of smiling country which stretch away to the northward. At the first-glance, it seems as though an immense sum of money had been expended for a very doubtful purpose. Not only is there no village visible, but there is really none in the parish. The people live in dwellings that are far apart from each other, and at such a distance from the central mansion as to render regular daily visits to its vicinity extremely problematical. But Sir Henry Peek was not to be deterred by ordinary obstacles. The district, in an educational sense, had been



shamefully neglected, and the kindly baronet was determined to find a remedy. Having erected the handsome school we have indicated, he took steps to ensure its being well filled. It was not only necessary to provide a competent teacher, suitable class-rooms, and a spacious recreation ground, but it was desirable that the children should be furnished with a good mid-day meal, and sent on their homeward journey in comfort. To a wealthy man the supply of all the requisite food would not have caused any great strain on his resources. This, however, was not what Sir Henry desired. He wanted to benefit his neighbours without pauperising them. He had furnished the school—making the interior fittings as perfect as the exterior design was pretty—and the scholars must pay for everything they got there. The tuition, of course, was the first consideration, and this, it was conceived, should be absolutely free to all comers. But to render it free it was necessary that a good grant should be earned from the Government. To earn a good grant the little ones would have to attend more regularly, and give greater heed to their lessons. To insure this increased attention they must at least be relieved from the gnawings of hunger; they must no longer be subject to the short-commons of the home larder; and the scant piece of dry bread—which was too often all they could procure—must be replaced by a plentiful supply of properly varied food. It was from some standpoint like this that the question was regarded, and hence arose the necessity for that system of penny dinners which has since been such a prominent feature of the scheme.

Those who desire to follow Sir Henry Peek's example will naturally want to know how the Rousdon experiment was started, how it has progressed, and how far it has realized the expectations of its founder. As we have already pointed out, the school was properly fitted to begin with. That is, there were suitable boilers in the kitchens, there was a sufficiency of crockery and cutlery in the racks, and there was a master anxious to do his best for the novel undertaking. With these trifling exceptions, the institution had no special facilities for the intended work. A simple announcement was made that the place was ready for the reception of pupils, and that all who came could have one adequate daily meal for a penny. As many of the expected scholars resided two or three miles away, and most of them over one mile, the importance of this arrangement was at once apparent to the people. It saved shoe leather, it guaranteed attendance in the afternoon, and it cost less even than the wretched morsels which had hitherto been drawn from the home store. As a consequence, the little people were drafted to Rousdon in great force. Farm labourers—who received only 12s. or 14s. a week—managed to send as many as four members of their families to be taught. Shepherds, coast guardsmen, mechanics, and even farmers followed suit; and it then became evident that, despite the scattered character of the district, there would soon be more applicants than the space at command could accommodate. All were treated alike when accepted; but a preference was shown, of course, for the children of the poorest. Though it was originally stipulated that the price for the dinners should be 5d. a week, and that the amount should be paid on each Monday morning, it was found, in practice, that the rule was capable

of considerable relaxation. As a matter of fact, the "penny dinner" at Rousdon does not cost a penny. It thus happens that, although the fivepenny charge is adhered to where only one member of a family attends, there has been a reduction to succeeding members. Two children, for instance, may have their dinners for 9d. a week, three for 1s., and four for 1s. 3d. There is no discount in the case of farmers, as they are said to be very well qualified to pay the full rate. But even with all the deductions, the scheme has been a financial success. From the commencement of operations in October, 1876, to the end of December, 1882, there were 110,221 dinners provided, at a cost of 107,406 pence. This shows that 2,815 dinners were given for nothing. Had all these yielded the stipulated penny, then there would have been a sum of £11 11s. 7d. remaining, as a set off against the outlay incurred over the boilers and other accessories.

But it has been urged that Devonshire possesses advantages which could not be secured in larger towns, and that private munificence has had much to do with the extraordinary results achieved. This is a fallacy. Sir Henry Peek denies that the dinner scheme has been helped by him in any way. He insisted, at the beginning, that there should be no back payments, and there has never been a single farthing of arrears. This has enabled the managers to arrange with certainty for each day's supply, and to avoid all wasteful and unnecessary outlay. Not having been assisted by private enterprise, therefore, the question arises whether there has been any favouritism from the traders. The answer is again in the negative. All the articles have been bought in large quantities, at wholesale rates, just as any other purchaser could have got them. Meat has ranged from 6d. to 9d. per lb., and suet 5d. Flour and bread have cost 1½d. Rice is set down at 2d., sago 3d., and prunes 3½d.; while treacle, sugar, and jam have varied from 2½d. to 3½d. Currants have been bought at 4d., raisins at 5d., and lard at 6½d. Apples were secured at 1½d., rhubarb and gooseberries at 1d. Potatoes, onions, and vegetables generally, have been grown in a garden attached to the school, but they have always been charged to the dinner account at the rates which were certainly higher than could have been got from customers outside. Milk is undoubtedly cheap at 8d. per gallon; but it is about the only article the townspeople could not secure at the figures we have named. Of the £447 expended, as much as £106 went for flour, £83 for meat, £31 for potatoes, £29 for bread, £26 for suet, £23 for milk, £22 for rice, £20 for sugar, £17 for currants, £14 for treacle, and £13 each for raisins and lard. This gives a fair idea of the material used in the gross. It may be of service, however, if we specify the whole of the items required during the last week in May:—

Monday: Jam Pudding.—24lbs. flour, 2lbs. suet, 7lbs. jam. Sufficient for 84 children.

Tuesday: Soup.—1lb. onions, 9lbs. bread, 1lb lentils, 30lbs. potatoes, 1lb. rice, one 6lb. tin of Australian meat. Sufficient for 84 children.

Wednesday: Rhubarb pudding.—24lbs. flour, 8lbs. sugar, 2lbs. suet, 24lbs rhubarb. For 86 children.

Thursday: Rolly-polly meat pudding.—14lbs. flour, 30lbs. potatoes, 7lbs. bacon. For 84 children.

Friday: Raisin pudding.—24lbs. flour, 7lbs raisins, 2lbs. suet. For 84 children.

It will thus be seen that 423 dinners were secured at a cost of 418 pence, and that the quantity provided was sufficient to allow each child an average of 8oz. of solid food per meal. How highly the warm repast is appreciated may be gathered from the fact that there were only three absentees during the week in question, and that nothing short of serious illness ever keeps a child away. Considering the distances to be traversed, and the rough weather to be encountered, this fact alone speaks volumes for the success of the entire scheme.

There is still another phase of the question which should not be lost sight of. A cry has been raised of late against overwork in public schools, and it has seemed to be well founded. According to the *Lancet*, however, "the education system is *not* overworking the children, but merely demonstrating that they are underfed." If this is the case—and it would appear to be so from the results at Rousdon—there is little doubt as to the direction in which the money of philanthropists should henceforth flow. As we have indicated, the material to be worked upon in Devonshire was at first rather unpromising. The scholars were the poorly-clad and miserably-fed offspring of agricultural labourers, and they knew absolutely nothing. While their bodies were growing, their brains were hungered, and they were thus "worse off than dullards." But with the advent of better food there quickly came a change. There was greater regularity in attendance, and the little ones were more robust in health, more ruddy in appearance, and happier in every way than they had ever been before. Not only did they gain bodily strength, but their minds expanded, and they were better able to understand the lessons they were taught. So marvellous was the improvement, indeed, that in 1880 there were 79 children, out of 89, eligible for examination. And what did they accomplish when before the inspector? As many as 98 per cent. passed in reading, 96 per cent. in writing and spelling, 98 in arithmetic, 56 in geography, and 79 in grammar. Eight of them did very well in literature, and five in domestic economy. This was an extraordinary performance when all the circumstances are considered. But, as may be supposed, there was a still further improvement by 1883. Of 84 children then on the books, 81 were submitted to the examiner, and there passed 100 per cent. in reading, 100 in writing and spelling, 98 in arithmetic, 100 in geography, and 87 in grammar; whilst 14 got creditably through their "little go" in literature, and 11 in domestic economy. Order, discipline, singing, and needlework were described as good, and the whole school classed as "excellent." When these figures were quoted in the House of Commons, in July last, there was not a member in attendance who failed to endorse Mr. Mundella's assertion that "it would be impossible to find a better school." The high opinion of the Vice-President of the Council is shared by Her Majesty's inspectors. They say it is a pleasure to visit Rousdon; that four out of five of the children always pass easily; and that the examination, difficult as it is, hardly does justice to the condition of the establishment. This would be extremely satisfactory in itself, even if there was not a more pleasing consideration to follow. The Government grant earned last year was a trifle over £86. Every

farthing of this goes to the schoolmaster, and with free house and garden, constitutes his stipend. For the parents, the result is not less gratifying. Having earned such a liberal grant there is nothing to be paid for fees, and hence it happens that the four bairns of a farm labourer not only get 20 dinners for 1s. 3d., but have their entire education free. This surely ought to prove an additional inducement, if one were needed, for an extensive trial of the dinner system amongst the poor and needy of all districts.

In the face of such results, it is scarcely necessary to say another word in support of our "model school." We may just add that the class rooms are spacious and airy, that the play-grounds are places in which real enjoyment can be secured, and that the cloak-room could, with advantage, be imitated by every school in the land. After their long walks in the mornings, the outer garments of the little people are not unfrequently wet, bedabbled, and dangerous. In the cloak-room, however, the clothes are ranged on pegs immediately above a series of hot-water pipes, and, by four o'clock, they are as dry and comfortable as they can be made. A wash and brush up, in a conveniently placed lavatory, is the last duty of the day, and the children then hasten to their homes—brighter and happier, after a hard day's work, than most other scholars are when they begin. It has been our good fortune to see them both at work and at play, and we can confidently assert that a bonnier, cleaner, or more healthy-looking lot of youngsters we have never seen. Their physique is admirable, their intelligence undoubted, and there is an air of quiet confidence about them which success seldom fails to inspire. They were romping outside when the dinner bell rang, and it is but justice to say that the readiness of the response cleared the yard with truly marvellous rapidity. It was a raisin pudding day, and as this is always a favourite dish, there was the usual anxiety to make acquaintance with the steaming slices. But there was no lack of discipline. Once inside the corridor, the children were formed in line, marched to their seats, and, having sung grace very sweetly, began operations in earnest. The food was abundant, it was decidedly toothsome, and a most enjoyable repast was made. Everybody looked pleased and satisfied, and a merrier company could scarcely have been seen than the one which, a few minutes later, was again exercising lung and muscle in the playground. The dinner is cooked by the schoolmaster's family; but it is served by some of the senior pupils. The older girls also take a share in arranging the tables, washing up after the feast, and keeping clean and tidy the room in which they dine. It is in every way a good work that is being carried on, and those connected with it are deserving of all honour. Sir Henry Peek should receive the thanks of poor children all the world over for the noble effort he has made to improve their condition. Mr. Burgess, the schoolmaster, is equally entitled to commendation for the hearty manner in which he has striven to solve a difficult problem, and to ensure an undoubted success. But it is the scholars, perhaps, who most richly merit praise, for the earnest, persistent, and admirable efforts they have made to reap the full benefit of their grand opportunity.







